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SUBJECT: NIGERIAN FOREIGN MINISTER AND HIGH COMMISSIONER IN CAMEROON TALK BAKASSI, BILATERAL RELATIONS

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Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Scott Ticknor for reasons 1.4 (d) and (e)

¶1. (C) Summary: Nigerian Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe, speaking at the launch of the Nigeria-Cameroon Joint Commission in Yaounde, praised the peaceful resolution of the Bakassi dispute and heralded "a new day" in Cameroon-Nigeria relations. He outlined the "urgent" need for joint military patrols to counter criminals trying to drive a wedge between the two countries. Nigeria's High Commissioner to Cameroon is also optimistic about bilateral relations and told Charge that he had already discussed joint security patrols with senior Government of Cameroon (GRC) officials. The High Commissioner highlighted the priority need for road building and development in Bakassi. The concomitant meetings in Yaounde this week of the UN-sponsored Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission and the Joint Commission promise to put new energy into improving relations between Cameroon and Nigeria. End summary.

Nigerian Foreign Minister: "It's a New Day in Relations"

¶2. (U) In a speech at the launch of the Fourth Meeting of the Joint Commission on October 9 in Yaounde, Nigerian Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe proclaimed "it's a new day in Nigeria-Cameroon relations." He praised the resolution of the Bakassi dispute as a model of conflict resolution for the world and asserted that African nations need to focus on fighting poverty rather than on the "distractions" of boundary disputes. Nigeria and Cameroon needed to sustain the momentum and to deepen and broaden bilateral ties, while not taking the relationship for granted, he said. Maduekwe noted that UNSYG Ban Ki-Moon had praised the resolution of Bakassi during a recent meeting in New York.

¶3. (U) Maduekwe highlighted Nigeria's strategic interest in its relationship with Cameroon. He pointed to the four million Nigerians living in Cameroon, who he said the Nigerian government encouraged to contribute actively to Cameroonian society. He noted the potential for expanded business ties and hoped Cameroonian and Nigerian elites would more frequently visit each other's countries. He underscored the importance of connecting Cameroon and Nigeria by road across the Bakassi area and said Cameroon had made better progress than Nigeria on such road construction, with African Development Bank support.

¶4. (U) The Foreign Minister stressed the "urgent" need for joint Nigerian-Cameroonian military patrols. He saw the need for security forces of both countries to "buy into" the

political decisions on Bakassi and to see themselves as "Ambassadors of good will." They need to get beyond "demonizing" each other to now "go the extra mile" to work together "as brothers", he added. Nigeria and Cameroon's only mutual enemy, he continued, was "non-state actors" who wish to exploit old grievances "to put a wedge between our countries". Nigeria and Cameroon can counter this through security cooperation and by "making the Joint Commission fully operational" after a six year gap (the last Joint Commission meeting was in 2002). He also hoped Cameroon would consider reviving consultative meetings with the African Union.

High Commissioner Echoes Positive Views

¶5. (SBU) In an October 6 meeting, Nigerian High Commissioner to Cameroon Philip Dauda told Charge that lingering opposition to the Bakassi handover from within Nigeria was a reflection of domestic democratic politics, led by politicians and party activists who stood to lose constituents in the region. However, he thought that "by and large" opponents were putting the handover behind them.

¶6. (SBU) The priority for Bakassi is now development, he said, citing the most urgent needs as infrastructure (especially roads) and security against piracy. While such development was the responsibility of the Government of Cameroon, the Nigerian government needed to help by developing the areas bordering Bakassi. Dauda confirmed that the African Development Bank is financing a two-year project to build a road along the western coast of the Peninsula connecting parts of Bakassi with Calabar in Nigeria. Many Nigerians who left Bakassi before the handover are in a "wait

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and see" mode and are reportedly being well cared for by the Nigerian government, although Dauda thought they would likely return eventually to resume their lives in Bakassi.

¶7. (C) Dauda noted that the UN-sponsored Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission and the Nigeria-Cameroon Joint Commission were meeting in Yaounde this week (we will report septel on outcomes of these meetings after they finish on October 11). He confirmed that joint security patrols were a priority for discussion by the Joint Commission; the High Commissioner had already discussed the issue with Cameroonian Prime Minister Ephraim Inoni and Minister of Justice and Vice Prime Minister Amadou Ali. Despite the disparities in military capability, the High Commissioner was confident Cameroon would be able to contribute to a joint patrol and hoped the United States could help this effort. Dauda pointed to the initial exchange of two Nigerian army colonels at Cameroon's Military Staff College for the year and he saw scope for a similar exchange of Cameroonian military to Nigeria.

¶8. (C) Dauda highlighted that Nigeria had worked hard to ensure the success of the August 14 Bakassi handover in Calabar. The Government of Nigeria had offered to do it in Calabar "to avoid any untoward event". The Nigerian Navy Chief of Staff was in Calabar for the handover but remained in his hotel when the Nigerians learned that Cameroon was not sending an official of a similar rank. Nigeria would also have sent its Minister of Justice if Cameroon had sent its counterpart, Dauda noted.

Comment

¶9. (SBU) There is a great deal of optimism in the air in Yaounde about strengthening Nigerian-Cameroonian relations and taking concrete steps toward greater cooperation on Bakassi. Dauda promises to be a helpful partner on these fronts. Both countries appreciate the role the U.S. has played and can continue to play. Foreign Minister Maduekwe told Pol/Econ Chief he was very pleased with his recent

meeting with A/S Jendayi Frazer, in which he said Bakassi was discussed. In his speech at the opening of the Joint Commission, Cameroonian Foreign Minister Delegate for Commonwealth Affairs Joseph Dion Ngute thanked the UNSC and the four witness states for their role in reaching a "milestone which rewrote history". He also praised the dawn of a new era of Cameroon-Nigerian relations. Defense Attaché briefed the High Commissioner on US-Cameroon military-military exchanges, especially the African Partnership Station and our maritime security engagement.

¶10. (C) The optimism notwithstanding, there is much to be done before Cameroon and Nigeria can begin substantive cooperation. Direct mil-mil relations are almost non-existent, and capabilities are limited. In Calabar on the fringes of the handover ceremony in August, Nigerian Rear Admiral Ba Raji, Commandant of the Eastern Naval Command, told our Charge and DATT that his navy did not see itself as a peer of the Cameroonian - "after all, they can barely put a boat to sea while we sail to South America." He appreciated the need for improved cooperation, though, and saw the U.S. as a necessary catalyst in improving military relations between the two countries, and saw activities of the African Partnership Station as a useful vehicle - among others - for improving maritime security cooperation. This week's meetings in Yaounde could help open new opportunities for the United States to be supportive at this historic moment for Cameroon and Nigeria.

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